



March 2022

Senator Paul Sarlo - Chair
Senate Budget and Appropriations

Ms. Diane Riley
Executive Director

Senator Sarlo and members of the committee, as Executive Director, I am writing on behalf of the Board of Trustees and members of the Supportive Housing Association of NJ (SHA). For 24 years now, our membership organization representing over 110 agencies stands dedicated to the creation of permanent, affordable housing with flexible supportive services for people with disabilities and other special needs. These needs might include those with serious mental illness, addictions, intellectual and developmental disabilities, adult-onset physical disabilities, seniors, and those experiencing homelessness. Although their requirements might be different, they are all in need of safe, decent housing and supportive services. More people today are living in communities of their choice and receiving services they need to lead full and independent lives to the best of their abilities. But there are so many more who continue to live at home with aging parents wondering what will happen in the future or those who are living in substandard or temporary housing with no idea where they will go next. These were common stories before COVID-19 upended the nation and are even more prevalent now. Having addressed these problems incrementally in the past, a recommitment and larger investment in proven ideas and strategies is needed. These strategies encompass a combination of capital funding, operating support, and access to staff and services that will allow all those currently waiting to finally find a home. In the end, this investment will provide not only a better quality of life for more people but will do so in a more cost-effective way allowing us to be good stewards of our public funding. The following are a few suggested 2023 budget and policy priorities that would help us move forward.

Capital – First and foremost, we strongly support Gov. Murphy’s proposal to invest more than \$300M from New Jersey’s American Rescue Plan allocation to help create thousands of homes for low income residents. By using this funding to support already approved municipal developments, this budget will ensure the creation of homes throughout the state that people can afford. SHA supports Governor Murphy’s continued investment in NJ’s Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) and more importantly the intention to deploy the funds in full and to the benefit of low income New Jersey residents. We thank the legislature and the Governor for adopting legislation in 2021 that annually dedicates \$20M in realty transfer fees to the Special Needs Housing Trust Fund. This annual investment effectively directs housing to our most vulnerable residents and those also in need of supports that allow them stability and independence.

Rental Assistance - Most of the adults living with disabilities are SSI recipients with an income of \$870 a month. Independent living continues to remain a difficult or impossible achievement for those on extremely low incomes without some sort of supplemental assistance. Housing vouchers provide that assistance and are the essential ingredient that allows people to maintain a stable home. We support the continuation of funding for the State Rental Assistance Program (SRAP). SHA appreciates the continued work of DHS and DCA in working together to create new

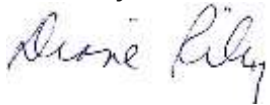
vouchers and service models. These vouchers are funded under the Department of Human Services Division of Developmental Disabilities as well as the Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services and managed by the Supportive Housing Connection. Payment standards for these vouchers that is the maximum amount of assistance a family can receive, need to be more aligned with SRAP and federal vouchers and maximized as much as possible. SHC vouchers have been inadequately funded in the past and this inadequacy should be addressed in this budget.

Supportive Services - Access to flexible services and staff is the third but no less critical part of the supportive housing industry. Moving people into affordable homes is the first step, but providing them with services is essential in helping them remain in their homes successfully. Maintaining a strong infrastructure in both provider and staff support is imperative.

As you know, staffing is the most critical issue facing many of our providers. Recruitment and retention of staff remains an ongoing challenge. This budget includes two provisions that address this difficulty. First, we are grateful that Governor Murphy has included \$41.7M in funding for DSP wages in the proposed FY 2023 budget. Similarly we greatly appreciate the legislature approved an increase in last year's budget. Direct Support Professionals serve individuals in the I/DD community and provide essential help that enable them to navigate everyday life. Secondly, we also ask that you maintain the Governor's proposed \$27M in state funds (with \$12M federal match) for wage increases for community based providers of mental health and substance use treatment in both contract and rates. We urge the legislature to maintain these provisions in their finalized budget. Building and retaining a strong, qualified and sustainable workforce requires a commitment to people living with these needs and the workers who support them.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Diane Riley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Diane Riley, Executive Director